

Prescription for a Healthy America

By Senator Debbie Stabenow

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As I travel around Michigan, there is one issue I hear about again and again – spiraling prescription drug prices.

many of these drugs. Their return on investment should be something better than paying the highest drug prices in the world!

I've heard complaints from small-business owners, Big Three auto executives, workers, hospital administrators, parents whose children suffer from chronic disorders, like asthma, and our seniors who use an average of 18 different medications a year.

I was recently appointed coordinator of the Prescription Drug Task Force in the Senate that has been tackling this critical problem. Let me tell you about some of the things we are working on.

These prices – rising by 18 to 20 percent a year – are creating separate and unequal health care systems. If you have the money or a great health plan, this nation can offer the best medical care in the world. But if you're a senior with no prescription drug plan, or one of the 40 million who are uninsured, or work at a business that had to scale back health care coverage because of these high prices, you can wake up one morning and find yourself facing a horrible choice.

First, it's long past time to modernize Medicare to cover prescription drugs and I'm cosponsoring legislation to do just that.

Second, I have sponsored legislation that opens the northern border of our country so that Americans can get the best prices for American-made, safe, FDA-approved medications that are sold in Canada.

Do you buy food, pay your utility bills or get your medicine?

When I organized bus trips to Canada for Michigan seniors and families we found prices cut in half or more. For instance, Barbara Morgan of Livonia – a breast cancer survivor – found that the anti-cancer drug Tamoxifen that costs her \$136 a month in Michigan was just \$15 a month in Canada.

No American should face such a choice. Americans pay about \$23 billion a year through the National Institutes of Health to fund the research that produces

But right now it is illegal to save money by purchasing drugs in Canada unless done through a Canadian doctor. I have introduced legislation – Senate Bill #2244 – that will change that.

Whenever we talk about reducing prices, the drug companies tell us that they would be forced to cut back on research. But there are other places they can cut that would leave research unaffected – like their huge advertising budgets.

The Fortune 500 drug companies spend two and a half times more money on advertising and administration than on research and development of new drugs. And to make it worse, American taxpayers subsidize the cost of this advertising through tax breaks.

I have introduced the Fair Advertising and Increased Research Act (FAIR) – Senate Bill #2486 – that allows the drug companies to deduct advertising expenses from their taxes only up to the amount they spend on research and development.

We have also proposed legislation – Senate Bill #812 – that would close the loopholes in our present patent laws that allow drug companies to keep less expensive

generic drugs off the market. These unadvertised brands have exactly the same content as the widely-advertised brands but are priced at 30 to 75 percent less.

Finally, we have proposed legislation that would make it easier for states to come up with innovative ways to lower drug prices called the Rx Flexibility for States Act – Senate Bill #2536.

These are some of the things we are working on. I invite you to get involved as well through “The Prescription Drug People's Lobby.”

There are more than six prescription drug company lobbyists for every United States Senator. It is time for your voice to be heard! The People’s Lobby includes families, seniors, businesses and workers who are sharing their stories and lending their names to the fight for legislation needed to lower prescription drug prices.

I invite all of you to add your voices to this effort by visiting my website – Stabenow.Senate.gov – and sharing your stories.

Drugs that are unaffordable are drugs that are unavailable. And that is unacceptable.